

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An optical element including: an alignment substrate; a liquid crystal layer formed on the alignment substrate, made by forming and curing a film of a liquid crystalline material; and a protective layer having high hardness, formed on the liquid crystal layer. The protective layer is for protecting the liquid crystal layer from being deformed by externally exerted forces. Preferably, the protective layer has a modulus of elasticity (= (elastic deformation) / (total deformation)) of 0.6 or more and a plastic deformation of 0.5 μm or less as determined by pushing an indenter into the protective layer with a test force of 2 mN in accordance with the universal hardness test method. The optical element has the advantages that the film thickness distribution of the liquid crystal layer remains uniform even when forces are externally exerted to the optical element in the process of production of the optical element or in the course of incorporation of the optical element in a liquid crystal display, and that the optical element can maintain its high displaying quality even when incorporated in a liquid crystal display.